

Department of Human Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, October 9, 2007

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*Important story at this spot

Group attempting to bring free clinic to Alpena



News Photo by Patty Ramus

Bruno Weber of Idstein, Germany, applies a sponge to cool an area on his steel sail boat that had just been welded Monday afternoon at the Alpena Small Boat Harbor. Weber bought the 1986 40-foot long boat last winter in the area after seeing it for sale on the Internet. He has been staying in Alpena since May fixing the boat and will be here another week before he returns to Germany for the winter. He hopes to sail on the Great Lakes with the boat in coming years, he said.

By JANELLE PACKER

Area residents who cannot afford to pay for medical care because they do not have health insurance or they do not have adequate health coverage, may soon have a place in Alpena they can receive primary medical care free of charge.

Interested community members formed a committee and began investigating the idea for a free medical clinic in Alpena in January. Currently, there are 52 free clinics in Michigan, but there are none in Alpena or the surrounding counties.

"There is a need here for people that do not have insurance. I had been working at a clinic in town and there were a significant number of people that did not return to the clinic for follow-up care because they did not think they would be able to pay," said Steven Hammond, pastor of the First Presbyterian of Alpena, physician assistant, and committee member.

The free clinic, which will be located at the Presbyterian church, hopes to be fully up and running by Jan. 1.

"I am confident that it is going to go, to what degree it takes off will be determined by the volunteers," Hammond said.

All the services provided at the clinic will be provided by volunteers. Committee members already have secured verbal agreements from various physicians, nurses, physician assistants, receptionists and others needed to run the clinic.

Funding for the clinic will come from donations and grants. It has received a \$4,000 grant from Presbyterian of Mackinaw.

The clinic will be much like a typical physician's office. There will be three exam rooms and a reception area. Initially, the clinic will be open two evenings a week for walk-in only appointments. Further down the road, the clinic is planning to be able to schedule appointments one or two days a week for follow-up care.

Additionally, the clinic will offer patient education. It will be available as a resource for community members who need information regarding their health and/or health care. The clinic will be available to answer questions about specific diseases or direct residents to other agencies within the community which may be of assistance, so they are not duplicating services.

"One of the reasons people do not get health care is because they do not know how to do it," Hammond said.

The clinic still is in need of equipment, but it will be getting that over a period of time. There currently are people securing various things the clinic would need. The clinic also has been informed if they need a certain piece of equipment for a certain patient there are different agencies within the community that would be willing to lend them the equipment they needed.

The committee will be hosting a meeting on Oct. 16 at 7 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church of Alpena to explain the clinic in further detail and identify people who would be interested in supporting the clinic with their time, energy, expertise, or funding.

Janelle Packer can be reached via e-mail at jpacker@thealpenanews.com or by phone at 358-5695.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Study says drug plans more costly for poor

Tuesday, October 09, 2007

BY KYLA KING

Gazette News Service

GRAND RAPIDS -- A study released Monday says low-income people in Michigan with certain state-funded, health-insurance plans generally have a harder time getting prescription medications for common illnesses than patients with private coverage.

The study looked at 130 of the most-prescribed drugs for heart disease, diabetes, depression and asthma and was used to rank 21 Michigan-based health plans on how easy they make it for patients to obtain prescription drugs.

Sponsored by the Grand Rapids African American Health Institute, the study was conducted by Ferris State University students who are studying to be pharmacists. The students spent 56 hours developing a spreadsheet comparing prescription-drug coverage formulas posted online for the 21 plans.

Rankings were higher if copays were lower and patients had less "hassle factor" -- such as needing prior authorization from doctors, being required to try cheaper drugs first, or being restricted to a list of specified drugs.

Health advocates say the first-ever ranking is significant because many people with government-funded "Medicaid" insurance are blacks and other minorities, groups that are more likely to suffer from heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure.

Advocates argue it will save money for everyone in the long run if insurance companies heed the findings and make it easier for consumers to get the drugs they need to keep chronic conditions in check.

"The average cost to treat a heart attack is \$46,000," said Lody Zwarensteyn, president of the health-planning agency Alliance for Health. "You can buy a lot of pills for \$46,000."

Dr. Khan Nedd, board chairman for the Grand Rapids African American Health Institute, said insurance companies also may be making patients sicker because many people may give up trying to get the drugs they need to control their condition if it means jumping through a lot of hoops to get them.

And, in some cases, requiring patients to use cheaper drugs first, or restricting access to some drugs altogether, can worsen their conditions, he said.

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Tuesday, October 09, 2007

Editorial

Debaters can show leadership on federal children's health program

The Detroit News

The tug-of-war over the federal children's health insurance program provides the Republican presidential candidates with an opportunity to move from beneath the shadow -- or is it a dark cloud? -- of President Bush.

The president vetoed an expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), saying the \$35 billion price tag was well above the \$5 billion increase he proposed. The bill Congress sent to his desk with strong Republican support would have extended eligibility for the benefit deep into the middle class, covering some children in families with incomes up to \$82,600 a year.

It was the first spending bill vetoed by Bush, and that in itself is a puzzle, since the president threw spending caution to the wind in his first term by creating the Medicare prescription drug benefit for seniors, a program that also heavily targets the middle class.

Congress overreached with its expansion of SCHIP, as is often the case with entitlement programs. Containing costs is an essential goal, considering that just this week the federal government announced Medicaid spending is expected to jump 10.7 percent to a record \$330 billion.

But that doesn't change the fact that a program protecting the health of needy children is needed.

The presidential candidates have an opportunity during their debate this evening in Dearborn to provide some leadership on the issue.

Do they stand rigidly with the administration, or do they have a better solution for protecting the interests of children? We'd like to hear a plan that makes sure the children of the working poor don't fall through the cracks, but one that also doesn't open the door to unchecked growth of the program.

A candidate who can articulate a sensible solution for restoring SCHIP will set himself apart on an issue that is critical for voters.



Dems hammer GOP on veto

Tuesday, October 09, 2007

Talk about leading with your chin.

Last week, President Bush vetoed a bill authorizing \$35 billion for children's health insurance.

The bipartisan bill, which subsidizes coverage for families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to pay for private insurance, would've expanded the safety net to

10 million children from the current 6 million. Money for the expansion would've come from a 61-cent increase in the federal tax on a pack of cigarettes.

Democrats Carl Levin, Debbie Stabenow and Dale Kildee voted for it. Republican Dave Camp was against.

Bush said extending the effort -- called the State Children's Health Insurance Program -- would make it available to the middle class when it was meant for the poor and that it would "crowd out" private insurance by tempting insured families to switch to the public one.

It also cost

\$30 billion more than Bush wanted to pay.

Do you think the Democrats are going to have a field day with that one? Health insurance for poor and low income kids? You can see the Bush Grinch now.

It's not as if he doesn't deserve some flak, though.

In federal money matters alone, the budget has grown to \$2.9 trillion from \$2 trillion on Bush's watch. At the same time -- during most of which the GOP controlled Congress -- the deficit has soared to

\$158 billion from a \$100 million surplus. And then there's that pesky little war in Iraq that's costing taxpayers \$10 billion a month.

Not really the right time to beat the long-dormant fiscal conservative philosophy tom-tom.

And the socialized medicine mantra doesn't fly either, as the American Medical Association and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association both backed the bill.

It's not as though the president couldn't see it coming, either. House Democrats made sure the first bill Bush vetoed this fall was on children's health care instead of any of the others he's said he'll veto.

The kid health veto certainly isn't going to win Bush any popularity contests, but that's a foregone conclusion anyway. A recent Associated Press-Ipsos poll already has him at a 31 percent approval rating on issues all across the board. That's the lowest in the history of the poll.

So, handed this prized political plum on a platter, Democrats are going to make Bush and the GOP pay. They've already said so. Not with a veto override, because by all accounts the House will block it. But that's not the point. Look ahead to next year, when Republicans are seeking office or re-election. We'll hear a lot about this veto blunder between now and then. Life in Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, consider this: Nearly one-fourth of children 5 and younger in Saginaw County lived in poverty in 2005. More than 30,000 people -- 5,000 of them 17 and younger -- have no health insurance.

They're still the losers in all of this.

TRIUMPHS

She refused to let abuse, mom's addiction stop her

October 9, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Estavanica Lovely found herself nodding off during her fourth class of the day Friday, a lecture on alcoholism and substance abuse by psychology professor Dr. Bertram Karon at Michigan State University's Old Horticultural Hall.

Part of it was the 18-year-old's fatigue at the end of an exhausting week of study and work. And part of it was that Lovely, who is one of Michigan's 19,000 foster children, already knew a lot about substance abuse and its effect on families from first-hand experience.

Advertisement

"My mom was addicted to crack," Lovely said in a quiet voice that held a note of determination, the same quality that helped her survive years of her mother's addiction and her father's physical abuse.

"It's a sincerely dramatic and confusing story," she said of her family's history.

Wayne County Juvenile Court records show that Lovely's mother had a history with Child Protective Services dating back nearly 20 years and that, at one time or another, all seven of her children were in foster care.

Lovely said her mother would buy her birthday and Christmas presents, then return them to get money for drugs. Lovely remembers the fear she felt as a young child when her mother's male friends would curse the woman and beat her mercilessly, once nearly to death.

At age 11, Lovely's mother sent her to live with a man who was not her legal father, though Lovely believes is her biological father because they look so much alike. For the next six years, the man abused her and her younger sister, court records say.

"She was actually the one who got herself and her sister out of this situation," said Loria Henry, foster care case manager at the nonprofit Ennis Center for Children's Detroit office.

"Most of our teenagers come in and they're past the point of believing in themselves and believing in people," Henry said. "They come in with the defense of 'Oh, you're not for me, either.' "

Lovely, however, "was always looking for a glimpse of hope," Henry said.

An avid reader, Lovely started writing a book about her life while in foster care through Ennis, Henry said. It wasn't pretty.

"I said, 'You're writing about foolishness; all your life has been about foolishness. You need a different story,' " Henry said.

Lovely told her, "I'm going to write another story."

She did so by studying hard at Cesar Chavez Academy in Detroit and, in a dual-enrollment program taking college-level courses for credit at Wayne County Community College. She graduated with a 3.9 grade-point average, second out of about 135 in her class.

At WCCC, she managed a 4.0 and was admitted to MSU this year. She is taking premed courses with an eye toward becoming a child psychiatrist.

Lovely is getting help with tuition and living expenses through the Youth In Transition and Educational Training Vouchers programs, which are administered by the state Department of Human Services to help children aging out of foster care. She also works part time in the cafeteria of her dorm, Akers Hall.

Lovely and Henry both said the youth program at Hope Evangelical Ministries, 4600 Livernois in Detroit, provided the foundation Lovely needed to get control of her life. She had been depressed about her family's circumstances and thought of herself as pretty much alone in the world.

"I didn't want to be like my mother and my father," Lovely said, adding that the workers at Ennis and the ministers at her church helped her work through "a lot of emotional issues."

Asked if she had advice or a measure of hope for other foster kids, she said: "Just be strong and find some way to get your emotions out. It's too much to deal with by yourself. Find something you can do to take up your time so you don't dwell on the bad stuff, and stay positive."

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Muskegon Chronicle

Convicted batterer calls abuse a 'sickness'

Tuesday, October 09, 2007

By Susan Harrison Wolffis

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At his most violent, Johnnie Means tried to kill the woman he said he loved.

He picked up a rifle, aimed it at her from across the room after a night of drinking, drugging and arguing -- and squeezed the trigger.

"By the grace of God," he said, "it didn't go off."

Enraged, he grabbed a pistol.

Before he could shoot, his brother wrestled the gun out of his grasp, likely saving the woman's life and maybe even saving Johnnie Means from a lifetime in prison.

"I'm not proud of what I did or who I was," Means, 57, said. "But I'm proud of who I've become."

Monday, Means celebrated three years of sobriety.

No alcohol. No street drugs. No violence.

"I'm living testimony that men can change," he said.

This week, The Chronicle has looked at the ongoing problem of domestic violence and how it affects different segments of society -- from spouses and partners to the children of assailants and victims and the police officers who intervene in emotionally and physically charged situations.

Means wants people to know domestic violence is a sickness that needs to be dealt with aggressively.

"Abuse is a disease," he said. "It's a sickness that has to be treated."

Although there is no typical profile of a batterer, experts say in the majority of the cases alcohol or drug use and domestic violence are intertwined.

"No excuses," an emotional Means said. "I can't blame it on the drugs. I can't blame it on the alcohol. My God, I almost took a woman's life."

For more than two hours Saturday afternoon, Means sat down for an interview with The Chronicle in the presence of his wife, Staci Means, 32, who is not the woman he tried to shoot more than a decade ago; their 2-year-old daughter, Jamariea; and Leodis Minnifield, 38, of Muskegon, who Means sponsors in Narcotics Anonymous.

"I've seen what he's done with his life," Minnifield said, "and that's the road I want to go down. I want to follow in his footsteps."

Johnnie Means, who labels himself a "recovering abuser," as well as a "recovering addict," agreed to tell his story to give "a voice of hope" to others.

"A lot of people know my track record," he said. "Turning your life around is not easy, but there's hope. I'm

putting this out there because I'm not this monster. I was caught in a sickness I didn't want."

Johnnie Means didn't stop drinking or drugging the night he almost killed a woman. Nor did he stop physically abusing women, not even after he and his wife -- whom he met after that incident -- were married eight years ago.

Together, Johnnie and Staci Means continued on an odyssey of abuse, addiction, jail and, eventually, recovery.

"We were triggers for each other. We set each other off. I could provoke him, and he'd go off, but not anymore," said Staci Means. "I'm so proud of my husband."

"No excuses," Johnnie Means said, "but I didn't have any coping skills. Violence was my way of trying to control her ... of setting fear in her in a way. If I can get into your mind and make you afraid of me, that's what it's all about."

Theirs was a tumultuous relationship from the beginning. More than once, the police were called to their house in downtown Muskegon to settle things between them.

"I felt less than a man for laying hands on my wife," Johnnie Means said. "I'd wake up in the morning, thinking: 'What did I do?' I was actually ashamed. I'd say I was sorry, but that don't get it. You know? It just don't get it."

He served time in jail on domestic violence charges both in Muskegon and Ottawa counties, he said; his longest jail term was 90 days.

Studies consistently show that the most effective deterrent to domestic violence is incarceration.

"Maybe in the short term," Johnnie Means said, "but the actual antidote to abuse is counseling. If you treat (domestic violence) for what it is, a sickness rather than a crime, you'd make more progress."

Three years ago, he decided he "didn't want to live that way anymore. I wanted to change." If there was a specific incident that scared him straight, he couldn't -- or wouldn't -- say.

"I used to blame my wife a lot for what happened," he said. "Until I came to the realization that it was up to me, until I got through that wall of denial, I couldn't go anywhere."

In 2004, he signed up for counseling at the former Child and Family Services, now Hackley Life Counseling. He joined Narcotics Anonymous. He credits both with keeping him straight for the past three years.

His wife took a slower route to recovery. She has been sober for six months, off the streets, "learning how to be a mother," she said.

Staci Means was in prison on charges of drug possession when Jamariea was born. Johnnie Means went to the prison hospital and took custody of their daughter while she served time.

The couple already had relinquished one child to adoption seven years ago after that child was removed from their home because of their continuing drug abuse. Staci Means has two children from other relationships, both of whom are in the custody of relatives. Johnnie Means also has one other child from a previous relationship.

"I want Jamariea to know a house of peace," Johnnie Means said. "What we're displaying is love."

Although his father never struck his mother that he witnessed, he said he and his siblings were disciplined violently, often with straps or switches. He grew up with violence he does not want his daughter to inherit. Today, if he and his wife start to argue, one goes into the kitchen to cool off, and they talk about the situation when cooler heads prevail.

"By no means is it about perfection," he said. "It's about growth. There's less and less chaos here."

He stopped the conversation, almost in mid-sentence, to make eye contact with his wife while Jamariea ran between them, throwing herself at them for attention.

She almost always ended up on her daddy's lap.

While his wife was in prison, Johnnie Means took parenting classes to supplement his counseling sessions.

"That's what a real man does," he said. "He goes for support instead of trying to do it alone."

On disability after a stroke left him unable to work, Johnnie Means said his life of sobriety and nonviolence today is "worth more than any material riches."

Like many who go through 12-step recovery programs, he offers his apologies to past victims -- women who survived physical and emotional abuse at his hands.

"It doesn't matter what kind of abuse it is, each stage scars you," he said.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Woman arraigned in mother's death

Tuesday, October 09, 2007

By Rex Hall Jr.

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KALAMAZOO -- The daughter of an elderly Portage woman who police suspect was abused before she died was arraigned Monday in Kalamazoo County District Court.

Diane Diamante, 56, of Portage, is charged with second-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter in connection with the death of her mother, 87-year-old Margaret Diamante.

Margaret Diamante was hospitalized Aug. 5 after Portage police responded to a call that she was going in and out of consciousness at her Woodbridge Lane home. She died Aug. 17 at Borgess Nursing Home.

Investigators have said her injuries included trauma to the back of her head and bruising to her chest, face, arms and legs. Preliminary autopsy results showed a brain injury was the primary cause of death, police have said.

A judge on Monday ordered Diane Diamante held on \$10,000 bond. She is scheduled to be back in court Oct. 17 for a probable-cause hearing.

Gazette staff writer Lynn Turner contributed to this report.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Cold fact: Winter heat to cost more

Tuesday, October 09, 2007

BY ALAN ZIBEL

Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Heating bills will rise dramatically this winter for U.S. homeowners using heating oil, while those depending on natural gas should see more stable costs from a year ago, a consumer group said Monday.

Average spending on home heating this winter is forecast to rise by 10.5 percent driven by big increases in heating oil prices, according to the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association, which represents state-run low-income energy assistance programs.

"If you're poor, it's going to be tough whatever (fuel) you use," said Mark Wolfe, the association's executive director.

There is help available locally. The Salvation Army serving Kalamazoo County has a fund to help those who qualify.

Terry Dedoes, spokesman for Consumers Energy in Southwest Michigan, said the utility company will work with people having trouble paying their bills.

"We will work with people, but it is important that they call us as soon as they think they are going to have trouble," Dedoes said. "They shouldn't wait until they get a shut-off notice to call us. The more notice we have, the more we'll be able to work with them."

The outlook for natural gas customers -- natural gas is the most widely used source of fuel for residential heating in the country, especially across the Midwest-- is not as dire, according to the association, which held a joint press conference with a trade group representing natural-gas utilities.

The American Gas Association said it expects natural gas bills to be somewhat lower this winter because of ample supplies. A \$4.4 billion pipeline that brings fuel from Wyoming and Colorado to the Midwest and eastern states is partially complete.

The gas association also noted that supplies of natural gas and prices are influenced by unusual weather patterns, such as Monday's unseasonably warm weather.

The low-income-advocacy group, however, is less optimistic. Natural gas customers should see their heating bills rise by 6 percent, the National Energy Assistance Directors' Association said, while those who use electric heat should expect a 7 percent jump.

Gazette staff writer Jeff Barr contributed to this report. He can be reached at 388-8581 or jbarr@kalamazoo gazette.com.

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Detroit Free Press

October 9, 2007

COTS to honor those who help homeless people

In celebrating its 25th year of operation, the Coalition on Temporary Shelter (COTS) will recognize people and organizations instrumental in helping the homeless help themselves.

The event is from 6 to 9 p.m. Oct. 24 at the Roostertail, 100 Marquette Drive.

A special tribute will be extended posthumously to Maryann Mahaffey, president of the Detroit City Council from 1973 to 2005. Mahaffey was a longtime friend and partner of COTS. She died July 27, 2006.

In addition, more than 30 individuals and corporations will be recognized for their efforts.

A strolling dinner and dessert and cash bar will be available. The cost is \$50 per person. To order tickets, call COTS development coordinator at 313-831-3777 ext. 285.

Founded in 1982, COTS is a private, nonprofit organization that provides emergency shelter, transitional and permanent housing and comprehensive support services for Detroit's homeless population.

For information, go to www.cotsdetroit.org.c

Compiled by Robin Erb and other Free Press staff.